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ABSTRACT

The staff of the Early Childhood Curriculum and Evaluation Project of the Mississippi State Department of Education developed the Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Social Competency (KIDSC) in 1986 as a means of evaluating the state's program goals in the area of self-concept. Positive results from field testing indicated the usefulness of the instrument. The KIDSC was administered as pretest and posttest evaluations in the 1986-87 and 1987-88 school years. Focus was on determining whether students who started kindergarten with an "at risk" view of themselves as learners changed to an "adequate" or "high" view of themselves as learners by the end of the school year. The sample included approximately 5,000 students in 20 school districts. While only 22.9% of the students scored in the "high" self-concept group at the pretest, 40.8% scored in this group on the posttest. The low self-concept group included 20.3% of the preschoolers in September, and only 11.9% in April. Results suggest that a large proportion of Mississippi students were entering grade 1 with strong positive feelings of self in relation to school tasks. Recommendations are made for ways of increasing the numbers of children graduating from kindergarten with positive self-concepts. (SLD)

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The enactment of Section 26 of the Mississippi Educational Reform Act of 1982 mandated the creation of the Mississippi Early Childhood Grant-In-Aid (Kindergarten) Program (ECGIA). In 1985, 108 Mississippi school districts applied for and were granted aid to implement pilot kindergarten programs. Approximately 5,000 children participated in the pilot year program. By the end of the 1986-87 school year, all of Mississippi's school districts were participating by enrolling more than 30,000 children in the first year of full implementation. This 1987-88 school year, the number of children enrolled in Mississippi public school kindergartens increased to 37,568. The purpose of this report is to provide an evaluative analysis of the effectiveness of the kindergarten in the area of social competency.

Among the goals of the ECGIA program are the development of increased competence in dealing with emotional feelings and social situations and the development of a positive self concept. Numerous researchers (Combs & Soper, 1963; Purkey, 1970) have given recognition to the crucial relationship between social competency and academic achievement. However, few researchers have devoted time to the development of appropriate measures of self concept of the young child.

The staff of the Early Childhood Curriculum and Evaluation Project developed the Kindergarten Inventory of

Developing Social Competency (KIDSc) in 1986 as a means to evaluate the state's program goals in the area of self concept. This instrument was created because a review of the literature failed to locate an instrument which could evaluate these program goals, be given in whole group situations, and be machine scored.

A field test of the KIDSc was conducted during the 1985-86 school year in fourteen randomly selected school districts in pilot kindergarten programs in Mississippi. The positive results gained from the field testing of the KIDSc indicated the effectiveness of the instrument for evaluation purposes. Therefore, the KIDSc was administered as pre- and posttest evaluations in the 1986-87 and the 1987-88 school years.

Purpose of Current Study

The purpose of this phase of the evaluation of the Mississippi Kindergarten Program is to determine if the students who started kindergarten with an "at risk" view of themselves as learners changed to an "adequate" or "high" view of themselves as learners by the end of the school year. The kindergarten environment should be designed to meet individual needs and to provide opportunities in which a child can be successful and thus gain confidence in himself. Therefore, the question is proposed: "Was an inviting school environment provided for the kindergarten child that would enhance the child's ability to deal with

emotional feelings, social situations, and one that would aid in developing a positive self concept?"

Research Question to be Answered

As a result of participation in the 1987-88 kindergarten program, did students who started kindergarten with an "at risk" view of themselves as learners change to an "adequate" or "high" view of themselves as learners by the end of the school year?

Data Sources

Twenty school districts were randomly selected through the use of a random numbers table to administer the KIDSc in September, 1987 and April, 1988. The sample included approximately 5,000 students. The districts selected were: Grenada Separate, Laurel Separate, Pascagoula Separate, Clay County, Franklin County, Greene County, Hancock County, Jefferson County, Jones County, Kemper County, Prentiss County, Quitman County, Simpson County, Sunflower County, East Jasper Consolidated, East Tallahatchie Consolidated, North Tippah Consolidated, South Tippah Consolidated, West Tallahatchie Consolidated, and Vicksburg Separate.

Methods of Data Analysis

The Epistat statistical package yielded chi square values to determine whether or not a significant shift in frequencies occurred from low levels of self concept to adequate and high levels of self concept from pretest to posttest.

The administration of the KIDSc during the 1987-88 school year of the Early Childhood Grant-In-Aid (ECGIA) program yielded descriptive information about the 5,000 students. The data were summarized with the use of cross tabulation. The student population can be described as evenly distributed between males (52.5%) and females (47.5%).

Results of the Study

Extent of Social Competency Gains

Results from the Epistat statistical program indicated that there was a significant difference in the frequencies of students moving from lower self concept scores to higher self concept scores from pretest to posttest administrations. The chi square value of the low self concept group was 54.59. The chi square value of the adequate self concept group was 23.55. The chi square value of the high self concept group was 115.53. All chi square values were significant beyond the .001 level of significance.

Level of Students Increasing in Social Competency

According to the KIDSc evaluation, the children were classified in three levels of self concept: high, adequate, and low. Cumulative percentages located in Table 1 show that 22.9% of the students scored in the high self concept group on the pretest, however, 40.8% of the students scored in the high self concept group on the posttest. There were

Table 1

Changes in Frequencies of Students in High, Adequate, and Low Self Concept Groups from Pretest to Posttest in 1987-88

Group	Pretest		Posttest		df	x
	N	%	N	%		
High Self Concept	1097	22.9	1927	40.8	1	115.53*
Adequate Self Concept	2714	56.7	2230	47.2	1	23.55*
Low Self Concept	973	20.3	564	11.9	1	54.59*

* $\leq .001$

56.7% of the children scoring in the adequate self concept group in September, and 47.2% of the children scored in this group in April. In the low self concept group, there were 20.3% of the kindergarteners in September compared to 11.9% in April.

The question, "Did the 1987-88 kindergarten students who started kindergarten with an 'at risk' view of themselves as learners change to an 'adequate' or 'high' view of themselves as learners by the end of the school year?", can be answered affirmatively. A significant difference was found in the low self concept group from pre- to posttest. This difference showed that the low self concept group contained the smallest number of students by the end of the year.

Recommendations

"There is a persistent and significant relationship between the self concept and academic achievement at each grade level, and change in one seems to be associated with change in the other. This strong reciprocal relationship gives us reason to assume that enhancing the self concept is a vital influence in improving academic performance "(Purkey, 1970).

In Mississippi, the relationship between self concept and achievement has been recognized by educators of young children. For this reason, the development of a student's self concept is the number one program goal. The Mississippi

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kindergarten philosophy is organized around a child-centered environment so that the students can learn and develop at their own pace. According to the written guidelines there should be no pressure to behave or perform in a manner which is not developmentally appropriate for five-year olds and for the individual student.

The 1987-88 results of the KIDSc evaluation showed that significantly fewer students left the ECGIA programs with inadequate feelings of self than those who started the year with inadequate feelings. This suggests that the largest portion of the Mississippi kindergarten children are entering first grade in 1988 with strong positive feelings of self in relation to school tasks.

However, a warning must be sounded. Recent surveys indicate that educators are making kindergarten more academic against their better judgement (Hitz and Wright, 1988). This is a national trend that is also affecting Mississippi. Documented facts contained in this report, as well as at the Early Childhood Curriculum and Evaluation Project, show that an increasing number of schools in Mississippi are using formalized methods of instruction in the kindergarten classrooms. Most of the efforts of our staff to school districts concerning this problem have been ignored.

David Elkind says it best. "What is happening in the United States today is truly astonishing. In a society that

prides itself on its preference for facts over hearsay, on its openness to research, and on its respect for 'expert' opinion, parents, educators, administrators, and legislators are ignoring the facts, the research, and the expert opinion about how young children learn and how best to teach them" (Elkind, 1987).

Currently, all of us involved in early childhood education in Mississippi are allowing teaching practices in kindergarten classrooms to occur which are in opposition to Mississippi Kindergarten Guidelines (1986) and to what research indicates. Unless major emphasis is placed on quality education for five-year olds at the State Department of Education, the developmentally appropriate philosophy for kindergarten in Mississippi will be only on paper and formalized instruction will dominate the kindergarten classrooms in practice during the 1988-89 school year.

Formalized methods of instruction will cause many of the children in kindergarten to develop negative feelings about self and school. While the results of this program goal are positive for the 1987-88 year, it is critical that the State Department of Education stress that the Mississippi Kindergarten Guidelines (1986) be followed more closely in 1988-89 so that the number of children leaving kindergarten with positive self concepts will continue to increase.

The following recommendations are therefore submitted:

1. Detailed guidelines must be given to the school

districts concerning appropriate practices and inappropriate practices to be used or not used in kindergarten. In fact, it would be helpful for the State Department of Education to distribute copies of the recent policy statement from National Association for the Education of Young Children concerning developmentally appropriate practices.

2. A message from the State Department of Education must be generated which reflects that the State Department of Education in Mississippi supports the development of a positive self concept for young children over the acquisition of inappropriate skills and objectives.
3. The monitoring of Instructional Management Plans should take place to prevent schools from incorporating unrealistic and detrimental objectives for Mississippi kindergarten children.

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